

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH GENERAL SEAN BYRNE, COMMANDER,  
U.S. ARMY HUMAN RESOURCES COMMAND VIA TELECONFERENCE FROM IRAQ SUBJECT: THE  
INDIVIDUAL READY RESERVE, ITS PURPOSE AND PROCESSES TIME: 12:00 P.M. EDT DATE:  
FRIDAY, MAY 9, 2008

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CHARLES "JACK" HOLT (Chief, New Media Operations, OFFICE OF THE  
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE PUBLIC AFFAIRS: With us today, Major General  
Sean Byrne, who is the commander, U.S. Army Human Resources Command.

General Byrne.

GEN. BYRNE: Well, good morning. It's good to have the opportunity to  
talk to everybody today.

But before we get into the question-and-answers, like Shari said, I'd  
like to just give you some information, probably more information than you need,  
but I think this will probably help us with some of the questions that you may  
not have to ask later. I want to talk to you today about the IRR, the  
Individual Ready Reserve program, and one of the main reasons I want to you is  
because, having done this with you before through the DOD Bloggers Outreach, I  
know the value of the tool, and it's very popular for getting information out to  
the soldiers and others that are interested. I really respect and appreciate  
what you're doing to help the soldiers and everybody else be informed, and I  
think that as I talk you to this -- this topic today, hopefully, we can do the  
same.

Recent headlines have done some -- have suggested that some soldiers  
were concerned that we were calling them back to active duty despite injuries  
sustained while they were in or since they departed active duty. Now, I can't  
for a variety of reasons, to include privacy, discuss specific soldiers' cases,  
but I want to do is give you some information specifically about the IRR.

Let me give you a little background on the IRR. The IRR is a group of  
trained, experienced military professionals who stand ready to augment Army  
units. Today, we have almost 72,000 soldiers in the IRR, with approximately  
6,500 of them on active duty. So using the IRR is really nothing new. We  
mobilized and deployed soldiers of the IRR for Operation Desert Storm, and since  
9/11 we've been mobilizing and deploying them to support the global war on  
terror. I think many of us that are old enough would probably remember the  
World War II soldiers that, in many cases, served in World War II and then were  
mobilized again later out of the Reserves to serve in Korea. So it's nothing  
really, really new.

Soldiers serving in the IRR are by no means inactive, and there are many opportunities available for IRR soldiers to continue their military careers. They can apply for active duty, obtain professional development training -- and quite often earn promotions while they're in the IRR. However, we look for each soldier to meet minimum annual requirements that include updating their personal contact information for us as appropriate, attending musters, updating readiness screening questionnaires and responding to military correspondence that we may send them.

Now, there -- I see three main fallacies that I've seen lately associated with IRR soldiers. First, many people seem unaware that the IRR -- what the IRR is or its obligations, and they don't understand the delay or exemption program we have for IRR soldiers that they may utilize if they receive mobilization orders. Secondly, many people seem to believe that every soldier that is in possession of a DD-214, that's a separation document, has completely been discharged from the service with no further obligation. Wrong.

Third, a lot of individuals seem unaware that there is an eight- year mandatory service obligation that every individual coming on active duty automatically incurs. First, let me talk about the IRR and its obligations and the delay in exemption process. Soldiers typically serve two to four years on active duty, and when they leave active duty, they're transferred into the reserve components to fulfill the remainder of their obligation. The IRR is just one of several categories that a soldier can enter into. Other categories include active duty, active Guard and Reserve, troop units -- those are the individuals that may train on the weekends, one weekend a month, and periodically during the year have extended -- and then there's also individual mobilizations.

Now as far as delay and exemption processes for the soldiers. First, we certainly expect that the IRR soldiers will serve in the duty positions when called upon. And sometimes they're not able to deploy, or they have a personal situation, and they need to request either a delay on coming on active duty or an exemption.

First, there -- there's -- they need to come back, and we tell them formally, as we give them mobilization orders, what they can do, what they need to do if they need a delay and exemption. And it has nothing to do with friends in powerful places. Simply, it's what are the facts in their situation? Do they have a material change in their health? Do they have a material change in some other circumstance that would require us to either delay them until they're ready to serve, or possibly exempt them because they have a situation that they cannot overcome?

The IRR's mobilization orders come with an 800-number they can call to initiate the initial request for delay and exemption, and at that point they'll be given very detailed instructions on how to submit the request. Roughly about 50 percent of those who submit requests for delays or exemptions are approved.

As a matter of routine, the soldier will receive an administrative delay if their case cannot be adjudicated before their scheduled report date. Our command, Army Human Resource Command, will notify the soldier by phone and in writing of an approval of an administrative delay. The administrative delay will allow the soldier to get all the documents that he or she needs and provide us the opportunity to review the documents and the request.

Administrative delays are not unusual special favors; they're granted in accordance with standard operating procedures that exist to ensure a soldier's situation is carefully and completely considered. Instructions on the appeals process are provided to the soldier who disagreed with the findings of the delay and exemption order.

Second, as far as the DD-214, the separation papers and discharges, a certificate of release or discharge from active duty, or as I called it, the Department of Defense Form 214, 214 releases a soldier from active duty but does not discharge them from their remaining military service. That's what I -- I mentioned earlier, where a soldier could come in for anywhere from two to four years, but they still have a military obligation, a military service obligation, of up to eight years from the day they come on active duty.

Soldiers are to be made aware and reinforce that remaining military obligation at the transition centers, and Block 6 of the form they receive as they separate tells the soldier exactly how much time he or she has left on their eight-year military obligation, and Block 18 contains the words "Subject to active duty recall, muster duty, and/or annual screening." So I think we've taken the steps that we can to ensure that when a soldier leaves active duty, it should be pretty clear that they owe remaining service obligation.

As for the eight-year military service obligation, soldiers are made aware of that -- that total obligation, from the day they come on active duty, from the day they actually enlist. Every soldier who knows -- every soldier in the military should know that they have a military service obligation of no less than six nor more than eight. Most incur the eight-year obligation as part of their original contract. So to sum it up, I think we've got a pretty deliberate process by which soldiers who are called back into the IRR can submit a delay or an exemption request should they feel they're not qualified to serve on active duty. And we have eight-year military service obligations for soldiers departing active duty so that they understand -- they know before they leave active duty.

I was to stress, too, how proud I am of each and every one of the soldiers in the IRR, as I know that it is extremely difficult in many cases for them as they have left active duty and now they're being called back. But they're serving us proudly, they're doing well under tough circumstances, not only in war, but they're leaving their jobs and their families behind, and we truly appreciate their sacrifices.

Now I'd like to entertain any questions that you may have at this time.

MR. HOLT: Okay, Bruce.

Q General, Bruce McQuain from gando. First of all, I want to compliment your command for getting me my retirement orders a month ahead of my retirement. (Laughter.) And just thought I'd pass that along.

GEN. BYRNE: I would ask that any positives you want to put in your blog, we'll accept.

Q (Laughs.) Yeah, that was very nice to see show up yesterday. But anyway, back to the IRR.

One of the complaints -- and as a reservist for about 21 years, one of the complaints I had with some of the IRR had to do with how current they were

when they showed up and -- for whatever, their two weeks or -- and what type shape they were in, and, you know, how useful they were really. And I'm wondering if there is any sort of program to keep these folks at least somewhat current and monitor, you know, what type of shape they're in, that type of thing.

GEN. BYRNE: Well, as far as the monitoring of their shape, we're hoping that they are periodically -- there's a requirement for them to be updating their records, and letting us know changes in their status. Now as far as an IRR soldier who we do mobilize, for the most part they have been out of service for generally less than four years, in almost all circumstances, and they are hopefully still relatively current.

Now when they go to the mobilization station, when we first mobilize them, if they are being mobilized, and it's been quite awhile, we will send them through a refresher program at the base that trains their specialty or their MOS. We obviously try to find those that are more current so we can minimize that, but we have done that extensively over the last few years.

Q Okay.

GEN. BYRNE: As a help -- and any changes, dramatic changes there, that's part of what they need to tell us, because in all cases, obviously, we don't know if they've had a major change in their health since they left active duty unless they let us know.

There are also sometimes when they leave active duty, and their records reflect them being in good shape. And they may have gone through a process with the Veterans Administration that we don't know about, and that's part of why we give them the opportunity to present those -- that information to us as part of the delay and/or exemption process.

Q Now, you mentioned in here as part of this process where you sort of keep in touch and they're required to respond to you, musters. How often are those actually done?

GEN. BYRNE: Well, we have actually -- in the Army over the last year, working very closely with the United States Army Reserve, we have reinitiated musters programs. We've done I want to say six this year in different locations across the nation. We did four last year. But what we're doing is we are mobilizing -- we are sending out orders to individuals asking them -- and quite honestly -- I say asking them to come into the musters in a physical sense, to actually come in, go through processing. We're paying them their military pay for the time they're there. That is a true, real muster.

We are also having -- we're sending out notices to thousands of IRR soldiers to do a virtual muster, where we are linking them up with maybe the local armory, the Reserve unit in their location, and they are coming into that armory and going into the -- an automated process where they're going into the database in the computers and they are -- they are updating on their personal records, their personal status, their home of record and all that type of information.

We've done that with thousands over the last couple of years. We're putting more rigor in the program, and I think it's paying big dividends. It's surprising how many have gone to the musters, especially the ones where they

actually come to the location and go through processing, how many have expressed interest in actually coming into a troop-type unit.

The normal routine reserve unit, we're doing more and more of that.

Q Well, that makes sense. I tell you, I would think any Reserve commander would really want to do that for exactly the reason you point out, the possibility of recruiting.

GEN. BYRNE: Well, I won't tell you we're not using it to do some level of recruiting. We have recruiting and retention noncommissioned officers there, and we have members of the chain of command there. What we're -- our primary focus was just to find out the viability of these folks, make sure that they are in fact fit and ready, should be retained in the Reserves and also try and make sure that we have the most data on them.

But we also -- we walked them through a lot of the benefits that we have in the Reserve as far as medical, dental, use of some of the facilities such as the PX and the commissaries. And we talk them through their opportunities to possibly go to military training and their opportunities to be promoted if they stay in the program.

If they want to come -- if they want to be more active, then clearly if they're qualified, that's exactly what we want them to do.

Q Last question from me, General. When the -- you know, the stories that get in the paper are about those that they claim -- that are recalled that claim that they didn't know they had an obligation. You've gone through how you ensure, or how we ensure they know that. Is there any yearly method? Do we contact them on a yearly basis and perhaps count down their obligations so that there's no question that they know what they have left, and that they are indeed subject to recall until that day?

GEN. BYRNE: I won't say that we contact them. Now they're supposed to be told as they separate that they are supposed to be continuing to update their records and contacting HRC St. Louis on at least a yearly basis. Now we do in fact, at HRC St. Louis, go off periodically going through and using the contact numbers we have just to check to make sure that they are accurate.

One of our biggest problems that we have, quite honestly, is that a lot of folks do separate from the service. We know what their home of record is, or where they say they're going back home to. Regretfully, because our population is so mobile, what you have is Sergeant Byrne leaves the Army, he gives as his home of record his mom's home. Well, when he goes back he doesn't stay with mom very long, he moves out someplace else. And so we -- sometimes we have to spend some extensive time trying to track people down who have not come back and updated their records to us. But I think HRC St. Louis does a pretty good job of -- I won't say going out to everybody on an annual basis, but they spend a whole lot of time screening and trying to make sure that we do have the best addresses and contact information on individuals.

Q Thanks.

MR. HOLT: Okay, Andrew.

Q Yes, sir, Andrew Lubin from Military Observer. Appreciate you taking the time to talk with us today.

Sir, judging from the amount of articles I see in the paper about people in the IRR suddenly finding out, my God, I've got X many years to go, and I've got to go back to Iraq in an hour type of thing, what's the possibility that maybe the separation briefs aren't as thorough as one might think. There seems to be too many surprises from too many people around the country that maybe they're not -- maybe the paperwork is overwhelming, and nobody said to them, hey son, you've got to stay in touch for another, you know, five-and-three-quarter years.

GEN. BYRNE: Well 00 and I think we probably do need to pay more attention to that as they go through the transition centers. But I feel in my heart relatively comfortable that the information is in fact being put out. Is it being maybe put out as enthusiastically as it could, or is the audience going through receiving it? I can tell you that I actually was one of the very last of the draftees many, many years ago, and when I separated to go back to college, I know they told me a whole lot of things at the separation point, but my big focus was just -- was leaving to go back and do other things. And I maybe didn't focus on it as much as I should have.

I think the information is there.

I think that we probably could and should do a little bit better job at the separation transfer points. And trust me, we're going to do that. But also, that's part of the reason why I'm talking to you all today is because I know a lot of our young soldiers are very adept, and they're doing a lot of blogging, and I'm hoping that this also helps us get the word out.

Q Yeah. Fair enough -- and you're right, there's a lot of -- there's the thing about getting out 1,500, but I would think that certain things they've got to -- they'll want to take an interest in this, medical, bits and pieces of stuff. And I'm just curious as to whether or not they're -- this is just being glossed over. Just too many articles in the papers about people with these amazing surprises.

GEN. BYRNE: Well, let me put it this way, though. I think that -- you know, you say a lot of articles, just give me a ballpark. How many articles?

Q In the scheme of numbers, probably in the last six months, I've probably -- let's call it more than five and less than 20. The type of thing you see is oh God, you know, one more schnook wasn't paying attention, and I go on to something else.

GEN. BYRNE: Well, I will tell you that we've got about 6,500 IRR soldiers that are in -- mobilized today, and so I think that is probably a small number. But, you know, any number is big. And clearly we've got to do a better job of getting the word out.

But I think for the most part individuals do understand it. We will -- I do plan to do a little bit better talking to the transition points trying to make sure that message gets out. And also, any dialogue we have with you is going to be helpful.

Q Well, that's an interesting point. Maybe the members -- the members are very few and they're kind of skewed. I mean bad news -- bad news serves my own local newspaper whose -- you know, whose editor spent time in the Navy, has written four books about the Navy, I can't get articles in because

it's not trendy because I'm in a liberal area. But something nasty comes in, they print that in a heartbeat. You know, so maybe they just take the bad news and put that in there, and the good stuff they just ignore. GEN. BYRNE: Well, you'll have to judge that one. But like I say, I think we -- we clearly could probably do a little bit better. But I think also it's the typical -- it's -- a lot of times it's not an issue unless it affects me and then I'll be as aggressive as I need to be.

Q Exactly. Sir, are there any sort of standards as far as being able to either get a waiver or get an extension as far as material circumstances? You know, obviously cancer or something -- you know, some horrendous disease is a no-brainer. Are there any standards or is everything done on a case-by-case basis?

GEN. BYRNE: Every case is seen on a case-by-case basis --

Q Okay.

GEN. BYRNE: -- and we have a panel that looks at the cases. If there are medical questions, we actually have doctors that look at it. We quite often, as I talked about delays and exemptions, there's more documentation, and if someone just says, send something in that says, I have X, well, we probably yare going to need some sort of a documentation to ensure, and then we're going to have medical folks take a look at it.

There are sometimes when -- when the information is, shall we say, sketchy at best. We're going to ask those people to come on active duty to comply with their orders so that we can get a good medical evaluation done by -- by the right professionals, and we may make a subsequent determination that no, they are right. And, you know, that could be good for the individual in the fact that if there is some sort of a medical situation that wasn't documented before that they're now bringing up, we have the right medical people take a look at it. If they've served their active duty time before and it's service related, they may be able to use that opportunity to get into the veterans system.

Q Great, okay. Are there any exemptions or any deferments because of employment, because of financial situations?

GEN. BYRNE: Those are looked at on a case-by-case basis. Now for employment, I will say there may be consideration for folks that are in very specific law enforcement or very -- those types of situations. But for the most part, like I say, they're looked at on a case-by-case. If someone's claiming a financial situation, everything will be reviewed on it, versus not only the situation they're in, but what situation they would be in if they came on active duty, what their obligations are. They're all looked at very -- very, very carefully.

Q Do they have the same standard -- Bruce, I'm sorry, I'll let you go next -- do they have the same possibilities that -- in the Reserves that they -- if they get called up they're -- they have a job to come back to or are they SOL? GEN. BYRNE: Oh, no. If they are in the Reserves, and these soldiers are in the Reserves, they have the same benefits. Their jobs are to be held for them.

Q Okay, great.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Bruce, anything else?

Q Yeah, let me follow up on one, Jack, do you mind.

MR. HOLT: Sure.

Q General, you talked about more emphasis at the separation transfer point on making sure these folks getting out know that they have a continuing obligation. What is the emphasis at the recruiting level, when they sit them down and sign them up? And I know, again, it's really -- you know, you have a lot coming at you at that point. But is there enough emphasis there so that they're in the -- in the documents that they sign it is very clear to them that they have an obligation of X number of years?

GEN. BYRNE: Well, I can safely say that it is documented in the contracts that they sign. The -- the level that that may be discussed with them, you know, that's really hard for me to say. But I know that it is very clearly articulated in the contracts that they're signing.

Q Yeah, I'm just, you know, thinking out loud here that perhaps that's an area that needs to be emphasized a little more as well, so going in, they know that this isn't just two or three years, you're talking a total of eight, and that you're obligated to do it. And then it -- it's reemphasized as they get out.

GEN. BYRNE: Well, I think there are some programs right now where they call the program active first, where soldiers are actually being recruited by the National Guard, and they're coming on active duty in the active force for a couple of years with a commitment to go back into the Guard, which is very similar to the program we're talking about right now.

So I think in a lot of cases that obligation is being discussed possibly a lot more than it was in the past. But once again, I'll have to get with the recruiting command to -- and I'll discuss it with their commander out there as to the emphasis that they're putting on it. Like I say, I know it's very clearly articulated, and should be part of the discussion process for anybody contracting, but I really can't go into what every individual recruiter is saying.

Q Sure. Sure. Okay, appreciate it.

MR. HOLT: All right, anything else? Anybody else? Okay. General Byrne, thank you very much for joining us. Any closing thoughts? GEN. BYRNE: Well, I just want to say a thank you. I think this -- like I say, this is the second or third time that I've had the opportunity to use the blog network and get your questions, and I really do appreciate the fact that you've got the interest and you are giving us the opportunity to clarify what might be some issues in some folks' minds.

I think this is good. You know, as a guy at my age, and I won't tell you what my age is, I honestly have not done a whole lot of blog work, but I'm sure getting a lot of feedback that this helps really get information out. Hopefully, I've given you what you need to better articulate our situation -- and when I say our situation, the Army's situation -- in ensuring that we're doing everything we can to, one, make sure people understand their obligations; two, make -- help them understand that there are cases where we do need to mobilize folks out of the Reserve, but if there is an issue that we ask -- you



know, we're trying to get the information out, we're asking that they really do comply with what we've asked them to do. And if they've got an issue that's come up, they need to tell us about that issue.

Quite often, we've had situations, and I think it was Andrew referenced maybe five to 10 times over the last year where you've read articles. What's interesting is, quite often when we read an article about someone who says that they shouldn't be mobilized, they have not done anything to contact us to let us know. We -- we are really very careful as we review anybody's request for an exemption, a delay, any of those to make sure that we're doing the right thing for the individual and the institution.

And part of the reason I say that is because clearly if somebody is not qualified, then we need to not have them on orders and bring them on active duty. One of the worst things that we can do is try to bring somebody on active duty who's got problems that are insurmountable that are basically going to make it very hard or difficult for them to focus on their active duty time. And with what we're going through as a nation, and what we're going through as an Army, we really do need people there that are fully qualified, eligible, but don't have other things going on in their lives, or physical situations, emotional situations, that are going to cause problems if we bring them on active duty.

So we're trying to be as open-minded as we can, but at the same time still maintain the standards so that we're bringing the right folks on active duty. So I really appreciate you helping us get the word out, and if there's any kind of follow-ups, I would say, please, get the word to myself or Shari Lawrence here at Human Resources Command, and we'll get the word, and we'll get the response back to you as fast as possible.

But thanks an awful lot. I really appreciate your time today. MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Thank you very much. And if you have any follow-ups, just let me know, send them to me, and I will get them out.

Thank you very much, sir. General -- Major General Sean Byrne, the commander, U.S. Army Human Resources Command. Thank you for joining us today, General.

GEN. BYRNE: Sure.

Q Thanks, General.

Q Thank you.

GEN. BYRNE: Thanks.

END.